

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE – 16TH APRIL 2007

REPORT ON: THE CHILDREN'S RIGHTS SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK

REPORT NO: 224 - 2007

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To inform members of the work undertaken by the Children's Rights Officer for Children and Young People Looked After by Dundee City Council, for the year 2006/2007.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that the Social Work Committee:-

Note and approve the annual report on the work of the Children's Rights Officer for the period 31st January 2006 to 28th February 2007

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 There are no additional financial implications arising from this report.

4.0 SUSTAINABILITY POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The Children's Rights Officer has a specific role in providing the most vulnerable children and young people in Dundee with access to knowledge, information and support, which empowers and enables them to participate meaningfully in decisions affecting their lives. This creates opportunities to improve the quality of their lives in many social contexts.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 This report further promotes the status of children and young people of all abilities looked after by the Council, to give them parity with other service users and safeguard them from discrimination. The work of the Children's Rights Officer has a focus on participatory rights of children and young people who are looked after, creating equality of opportunity for active citizenship to a group acknowledged as having diminished life-opportunities.

6.0 MAIN TEXT

6.1 Background

6.2 The Children's Rights Service reached its seventeenth year on the 1st December 2006. During this period the service has matured and developed as an advice, information and advocacy service for children and young people looked after by the Council. The service is also available to those professionals and adults with responsibility for their welfare. The service has a positive reputation throughout Scotland and Dundee City Council has a right to be proud for having had the foresight to appoint the second Children's Rights Officer in the UK and the first in Scotland. Children's Rights Officers now exist in all but a few Councils in Scotland.

6.3 Update

6.4 The information contained in this report covers the period from 31st January 2006 to February 28th 2006. When making comparisons between the activity covered in this report and that of previous reports, this should be borne in mind. During the period covered by this report, there were 354 referrals for the support of the Children's Rights Service and 372 requests for advice and information.

6.5 Throughout the past year, the Children's Rights Officer has continued to make a significant contribution to the work of the Social Work Department. This has been achieved through membership of appropriate strategic planning groups, facilitating consultation with young people and contributing to staff, volunteer, carer and Social Work student training events. The Children's Rights Officer has also expanded the Advice and Information service to all Council departments and other agencies providing services for children and young people who are looked after.

6.6 The scope of the service now incorporates Education, Housing and Economic Development. The Children's Rights Officer also sits on the Board of Who Care's? Scotland and as a Trustee on the Board of the Scottish Child Law Centre. Through encouragement and support from the service, children and young people from Dundee are represented on the Board of Who Cares? Scotland and have been involved in a number of national consultations with the Care Commission and reviews conducted by the Scottish Executive. The service has also supported nine looked after young people to contribute to the recruitment of residential staff within Dundee City; a meaningful example of service user involvement.

6.7 An update of service information in leaflet form has been completed. Leaflets are now available to service users outlining their rights and responsibilities in various contexts. This information is also available on www.dundee.gov.uk/childrensrights

6.8 The Children's Rights Officer has established close links with the Scottish Commissioner for Children and Young People. This has ensured that children and young people in Dundee have had the opportunity to contribute to the work of the Commissioner's Office. Membership of strategic groups allows the Children's Rights Officer to contribute a Children's Rights perspective on policy development ensuring policies are congruent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

6.9 An aim of the Children's Rights Service is to help those adults, who provide services to children and young people who are looked after and accommodated, to promote a culture of rights. To this end, the Children's Rights Officer has delivered training to social work students, residential staff, foster carers and voluntary organisations.

6.10 For a breakdown of the data on referrals to the Children's Rights Service, see appendices, to this report.

6.11 **Service Users**

6.12 Eligibility for the Children's Rights Service is open to those young people who are looked after at home or looked after and accommodated in foster care or residential settings, both within and outside the City. This includes children with disabilities.

6.13 Children and young people in the 12-16 years age bracket represent the predominant age-group who contact the Children's Rights Service. However, there has been a significant increase in the service provided to the younger age group. The Children's Rights Officer provided services for 76 children aged below 11 years. Contact is maintained with those young people who are placed away from Dundee and have indicated a wish to remain in contact with the Children's Rights Officer. The service is also available to those people who have, in the past, been looked after by the Local Authority. For a detailed breakdown of referral information see **Appendix 2**.

6.14 **Advice and Information Service**

6.15 The advice and information service is available to both children and young people looked after and those adults with responsibility for their welfare. Requests for this service range from enquiries regarding procedures, to requests for advice and information on complex children's human rights issues. There were 376 requests for advice. Requests also came from teachers, youth workers, Children's Panel members, nurses and others with an interest in children's human rights. The service also provides training to voluntary organisations, residential staff, new foster carers and academic institutions. For a breakdown of referral sources, see **Appendix 2**

6.16 **Advocacy and Representation**

6.17 Children and young people have a basic human right to express their views and have those views taken into account, in matters affecting their lives. This can be an empty concept unless children and young people are informed of the right and empowered to exercise it. The Children's Rights Service provides advice and assistance to children and young people, to express their views in meetings, Looked After Children Reviews, Children's Hearings and other processes. Support is also offered to represent concerns with social work staff, other Council employees, and staff in other agencies.

6.18 An important principle of advocacy is independence. The Children's Rights Officer works in partnership with the young person's worker from Who Cares? Scotland to provide the **Children's Rights and Independent Advocacy Service**. Who Cares? Scotland offers organisational independence when supporting children and young people through advocacy, while the Children's Rights Officer is independent of operational duties and is managed within the Strategy and Performance Service of the Social Work Department. Working together with Who Cares? Scotland offers children and young people choice in who they approach for support. A new staff member from Who Cares? Scotland has been appointed following a gap of nearly six months. In future this new worker should take the majority of advocacy work for young people looked after and accommodated in Dundee. The Children's Rights Officer is responsible for providing advocacy to children and young people affected by disability and those who are placed outwith Dundee.

6.19 Over the past twelve months, there has been a 30% increase in requests for advocacy services and a dramatic increase in requests to support young people in Children's Hearings. Requests to support young people in LAC reviews has increased at the same level. Explanations for this include the availability of service leaflets, the fact that young people value the support given by the service and young people recognise the importance of expressing their views. Attendances at Reviews and Hearings are recorded separately to requests from advocacy as these place a significant demand on the Children's Rights Officer's time, given preparation time required as well as attendance. **See Appendix 1**.

6.20 **Complaints Service**

6.21 An important duty of the Children's Rights Officer is to ensure those complaints and concerns raised by young people, are given proper consideration by responsible officers. The role of the Children's Rights Officer is to enable and support young people to voice their complaints and offer assistance throughout the process, to resolution. Most complaints are resolved through mediation and negotiation with concerned parties.

6.22 There has been a reduction in the numbers of complaints. Complaints recorded included concerns raised in a number of contexts such as Residential Schools, Health, Police, Secure Accommodation as well as service provision within the Social Work Department. The number of complaints supported by the Children's Rights Officer has decreased by more than 50%, which is a significant decrease. This may be explained in part by the increase in advocacy and having concerns addressed without the need to engage formal complaints procedures. For further details see **Appendix 1**.

6.23 **Secure Accommodation**

6.24 When a child or young person is made the subject of a secure order, the Children's Rights Officer is notified. Contact is made within two working days of notification and regular visits are arranged with the agreement of the young person. The Children's Rights Officer ensures that young people understand their rights in relation to their circumstances and gives advice and assistance when it is requested. Staff are made aware of the Children's Rights Officer's powers and the range of assistance offered by the service.

6.25 Of the 13 individual young people who were admitted to secure accommodation, 7 were female and 6 male. The young women were more likely to request support than the young men and they accounted for a significant number of the referrals. This has been a consistent feature over the years. It is worrying that the high ratio of young women in Dundee entering secure accommodation is inconsistent with the national picture. The figures have consistently shown through the years that the majority of young people admitted to Secure Accommodation are placed there because of concerns for their welfare rather than offending being the primary concern. **See Appendix 1**.

6.26 **Disability Service**

6.27 The Children's Rights Service offers an advice, information and advocacy service to children and young people who are affected by disabilities. The service is also open to those adults with responsibility for their welfare. The Children's Rights Officer now acts as advocate for 7 individuals on a long-term basis. Access to specialist services and the response time are the primary concerns of children with, and families affected by disabilities. There has been a slight decrease in the number of referrals from this group, which may be accounted for by the appointment of a part time advocacy worker by Partners in Advocacy, to specialise with children and young people. **See Appendix 1**

6.28 **Safeguarding and Participation**

6.29 The Children's Rights Officer is currently working with young people to help devise an Exit Interview document for young people leaving Foster Care. This process will have a safeguarding function as well as allowing young people to have direct input into service improvement and delivery. It also sits as an example of allowing young people to exercise their right to be heard under Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to which Dundee City Council has signed up.

- 6.30 The Children's Rights Officer will continue to support children and young people who are looked after by the authority to access and influence the processes aimed at planning for their care. One young person from Dundee is already part of a national group assisting the Care Commission on matters relating to standards in residential care.

7.0 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Finance) and Depute Chief Executive (Support Services) have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

Alan G Baird
Director of Social Work

Date: 06/04/07

APPENDIX1**DATA BREAKDOWN AND YEARLY COMPRISON.**

N.B. When comparing data from the three periods it should be noted that the figures for 2003-04 relate to a fifteen month period, the figures for 2004-05 relate to a 14 month period and the figures for 2006-07 relate to a 12 month period. In future reports will be prepared which cover 12-month periods to allow for comparison.

Area of activity	03- 04	04- 05	06 - 07
Request to attend LAC Review	26	32	30
Request for advocacy	116	204	226
Request to attend Hearing	7	26	37
Request to support complaint	55	42	22
Support children with disabilities	53	69	30
Referrals from young people in Secure Accommodation	76	120	101
Request for information and advice	N/A	382	372

**Appendix 2
DATA Sheets**

TOTAL REFERRALS	354
ADVOCACY	226
COMPLAINTS	22
LAC REVIEW	30
ATTEND HEARING	37
DISABILITY ISSUES	30
ACCESS TO RECORDS	2
CONSULTATION	7

REFERRALS BY AGE	
0-5	29
6YRS-10YRS	20
11YRS	27
12 YRS	50
13YRS	37
14YRS	89
15YRS	60
16YRS	24
17YRS	9
18+YRS	9
TOTAL	354

REFERRAL SOURCE	TOTAL 354
YOUNG PERSON	228
SOCIAL WORKER	39
RELATIVE	28
RES WORKER	23
CARER	2
TEACHER	2
OTHER LA	1
HEALTH	5
SERVICE MANAGER	1
DIRECTOR	1
RES MANAGER	3
REVIEW OFFICER	9
VOL ORG	12

Referral by Gender	TOTAL 354
Male	Female
170	184

TRAINING OFFERED	
VOLUNTARY ORGANISATION	3
RESIDENTIAL STAFF	2
FOSTER CARERS	1
COLLEGE	1
Total	7

